

9B Defining and non-defining relative clauses

09.07 Defining and non-defining relative clauses

Defining relative clauses define a noun or make it more specific. They tell us which particular thing or what kind of thing. In defining relative clauses, we can use *that*, *which*, or *who*:

I love music **that/which makes people dance**.

I hate books **that/which don't have happy endings**.

My dad met the woman **who reads the news on TV** yesterday!

Non-defining relative clauses often start with *which* or *who*. They give extra information about a noun, but they are not necessary for the sentence to make sense:

The DJ was playing hip-hop. (This sentence is complete.)

The DJ was playing hip-hop, **which is my favorite kind of music**. (This relative clause adds more information.)

My parents are from Honduras. (This sentence is complete.)

My parents, **who came to the U.S. 20 years ago**, are from Honduras. (This relative clause adds more information.)

In writing, we need a comma before and after a non-defining relative clause. Don't use commas in defining relative clauses:

We visited the market on a **Sunday, when they sell clothes and jewelry**.

I met **Lucy, who was staying with relatives nearby**, for coffee.

In both types of relative clause, we can use *who*, *which*, *whose*, *where*, and *when*. Don't use *that* in a non-defining relative clause.

Have you been to **that restaurant where you cook your own food at the table**?

Did you meet **the girl whose father climbed Mt. Everest**?

After *where*, we need to add a new subject to the relative clause. Compare:

That's the shop **that sells** dictionaries. (that is the subject of the relative clause)

That's the shop **where you can buy** dictionaries. (the relative clause has a new subject: you)

Omitting relative pronouns

We can often leave out *who/which/that* or *when* from defining relative clauses:

He likes the cheese **(which/that)** I bought.

(I bought the cheese. *cheese* = object)

Don't leave out the relative pronoun if it's the subject of the relative clause (*who*, *which*, or *that*):

He likes the cheese **that** comes from Turkey. (The cheese comes from Turkey. *cheese* = subject)

Never leave out the relative pronoun from a non-defining relative clause:

This cheese, **which** Greg really likes, comes from Turkey.

NOT ~~This cheese, Greg really likes,~~ ...



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- a** Complete the sentences with a word from the box. Sometimes more than one answer is possible. You will use some words more than once. Which sentence is also correct without a relative pronoun?

that which who where when whose

- I love people _____ can make me laugh.
- I told Paula my secret, _____ she then told everyone!
- The movie _____ I saw was really good.
- Yesterday was the day _____ everything went wrong.
- This album, _____ came out in 1967, has some great songs.
- Mark is the person _____ father used to be a singer.
- The store _____ I bought this T-shirt has closed now.
- I met Sara, _____ husband I work with, yesterday.

- b** Rewrite the sentences, adding the information in parentheses as a non-defining relative clause. Use relative pronouns that refer to the underlined words.

- Ariana Grande performed "No Tears Left to Cry." (She recorded it in 2018.)
Ariana Grande performed "No Tears Left to Cry," which she recorded in 2018.
- "Auld Lang Syne" is sung around the world on New Year's Day. (It was written by the poet Robert Burns.)
- We're going to Cuba. (Mambo music comes from there.)
- The Glastonbury Festival also has theater, comedy, and circus performances. (It's most famous as a music festival.)
- My favorite singer is Beyoncé. (Her album *Lemonade* was released in 2016.)
- The best day of the festival is the last day. (There's a big fireworks display then.)

- c** Rewrite the sentences, adding the information in parentheses as a defining relative clause. Leave out *who*, *which*, or *that* if possible.

- I like the tune. (You were singing it.)
I like the tune you were singing.
- That's the DJ. (He was here two weeks ago.)
- We need music. (It makes you want to dance.)
- That's the stage. (We're going to perform there.)
- I downloaded a new song. (You'll like it.)
- What did you think of the music? (I chose it.)
- What's the name of your friend? (You borrowed his earbuds.)
- The song changed my life. (It's playing on the radio.)

- d** Are the sentences below correct (✓) or incorrect (✗)? Sometimes both sentences in a pair are correct.

- a I like music that makes me dance. ✓
b I like music makes me dance. ✗
- a It's a drum that you play with your hands.
b It's a drum you play with your hands.
- a My father, that is a dentist, looks after my teeth.
b My father, who is a dentist, looks after my teeth.
- a This album, I bought last week, is really good.
b This album, which I bought last week, is really good.